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# E-Books for Young Children

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## What is an Electronic Book (E-Book)?

In this technology-obsessed world, many people, including young children, read e-books. An electronic book, referred to as an e-book, is a digital version of a printed book that includes text and images (though some e-books are digital only). E-books can be read on computers, smartphones, tablets or e-book readers. Enhanced e-books include interactive features, such as narration, animated pictures, music, sound effects, links that connect to games and other entertaining content. Parents are buying e-books for their young children in growing numbers, and it is expected that a new generation may become more used to reading from a tablet or e-reader than from a traditional print book.

## E-Books and Children

Although many parents of young children still think that it is very important to read print books to their children (81 percent), e-reading has been on the rise (i). With current media usage guidelines, parents of young children often ask the question “Is it okay for young children to read e-books instead of print books?”

There are some clear benefits of e-books:

- Children can learn early literacy skills as well as some computer skills, from good quality e-books.
- E-books are convenient, as devices can store many books thus creating an easily accessible, always available digital library for children.
- It is fairly simple to download e-books, and children can typically begin reading within moments.

- E-books can also be free and inexpensive.
- With certain interactive features, children can enjoy reading e-books independently, which may encourage them to read more often.

However, there are some drawbacks:

- Parents don't use many helpful reading strategies (such as talking about the book and pictures and focusing on the story) while reading e-books compared to print books (ii).
- Children learn less about the story from e-books compared to print books (ii).
- The interactive features in enhanced e-books, such as games or interactive links can be very distracting (iii).
- If children are only exposed to digital books, they lose the hands-on experience of handling a print book.



## Choosing Quality E-books

Not all e-books are the same, and some commercially available e-books are not good quality ones. For example, some e-books include a beneficial dictionary that helps improve children's vocabulary, while others include interactive features that distract children's attention from the story. It's important to choose e-books with features that might help children learn.

- **Hotspots:** In enhanced e-books, "hotspots" are places within the e-book that are tapped to generate movement, sound or other interactions. These hotspots should be related to the story. When they

are not, they can be more distracting than educational (iv).

- **Read-Only Mode:** It is important that children read the story first in read-only mode to help them understand the story. Games and interactive features should be only available after the e-book has been read.
- **Narration:** First, a narrator reads the story, which is good for early readers. Second, words are highlighted in the e-book as the narrator reads them. With this feature, children will understand the connection between the printed words and what the narrator is saying.
- **Dictionary:** A dictionary, or links to explain challenging words, can help build children's vocabulary.
- **Forward and Backward:** Buttons or arrows in an e-book help children learn about turning the pages left to right as with a print book.
- **Repeated Reading:** These options help children repeat pages, sentences or specific words.
- **Print Version:** Choose e-books that are also available as a print book.

## Tips for Parents/Caregivers

- As with other digital media, e-books are not beneficial for children younger than 2 years old. Reading a print book is more educational for them (v).
- E-books should not become a babysitter. Parents/caregivers always need to be

present and interact with young children when they read e-books.

- If the e-book gives children the option to read the story themselves or use the narration feature, choose the former. If the e-book only has an audible version, parents can always turn the volume down and read it themselves.
- While interactive features embedded in e-books can be helpful, don't pay too much attention to them.
- Remember, this activity is about reading and parent-child interaction.
- As with reading print booksii:
  - Talk about the story following the children's lead. "What do you think will happen next? What is your favorite part of the story?"
  - Connect events in the story to things that have happened in the children's life.
  - Describe and explain new and challenging words in the story.
- Do not replace Print books with e- books. Print books should still be read everyday. E-books should be another tool parents can use occasionally (ii).

## Free E-Books

- If parents/caregivers are looking for free e-books, visit: [www.freereadfeed.com](http://www.freereadfeed.com) (<http://www.freereadfeed.com>), [www.freebooksifter.com](http://www.freebooksifter.com) (<http://www.freebooksifter.com>) or

[www.uniteforliteracy.com](http://www.uniteforliteracy.com)

(<http://www.uniteforliteracy.com>)

(available in a variety of languages)

- If you are an Amazon Prime member, you can borrow one book a month free from their online Kindle Store.
- Most of the public libraries offer e-books for checkout to all library cardholders. This is the link to check out e-books from the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District ([www.lvcclld.org](http://www.lvcclld.org) (<http://www.lvcclld.org>)).



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